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ABSTRACT

The challenge to public service forms of broadcasting posed by the adoption of neo-liberal communication policy strategies by a number of western European governments has presented the left with a dilemma. Traditionally these public corporations have been characterized as ideological instruments of class domination. Today, however, sections of the left have rallied around the public service ideal arguing that this is the last bulwark against the cultural barbarism of the marketplace. An examination of the development of public service broadcasting in the Republic of Ireland shows that the political economy of the media requires a more informed analysis of the complex relationships that obtain between the corporate state, capital, and public broadcasting, than is to be found at present in the critical literature. In Ireland today, the state's direct financial control over Radio Telefis Eireann (RTE) serves as an increasingly important instrument of political regulation of media content, reinforcing the effect of the existing censorship legislation. The current political campaign against this legislation and the struggle of the trade unions to defend jobs and services in the public sector media field must be linked to demands for an end to censorship and for an extension of access to communication resources. Television program output statistics for home produced programs and financial information on RTE are appended. (21 end notes, 15 references) (Author/CGD)

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Public Service Versus The Market

A False Polarity?

The Case Of Irish Broadcasting

by

Niall Meehan and Des Bell

Paper presented to the International Television Studies Conference

London 1986

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PUBLIC SERVICE VERSUS THE MARKET - A FALSE POLARITY?

THE CASE OF IRISH BROADCASTING

by

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ABSTRACT

The challenge to public service forms of broadcasting posed by the adoption of neo-liberal communication policy strategies by a number of Western European governments has presented the left with a dilemma. Traditionally these public corporations have been characterized as ideological instruments of class domination. Today, however, sections of the left have rallied around the public service ideal arguing that this is the last bulwark against the cultural barbarism of the market place.

On the basis of an examination of the development of public service broadcasting in the Republic of Ireland (currently experiencing a profound crisis) we argue that the Political Economy of the Media requires a more informed analysis of the complex relation that obtains between the corporate state, capital and public broadcasting than is to be found at present in the critical literature.

In particular we examine how in Ireland today the State's direct financial control over RTE serves as an increasingly important instrument of political regulation of media content - reinforcing the effect of the existing censorship legislation (Section 31 of the Broadcasting Act). We discuss the current political campaign against Section 31 and argue that trade union struggles to defends jobs and services in the public sector media field must be linked to demands for an end to censorship and for an extension of access to communication resources.

THE PARAMETERS OF THE CONTEMPORARY POLICY DEBATE IN COMMUNICATION

The contemporary debate on the role of new media technologies within broadcasting, it has been noted, has much wider prameters than traditional policy discussions within broadcasting. These in the past focussed on issues of cultural content, political bias and journalistic ethics. Broadcasting policy is now, however, motivated by the wider concerns of political economy. Parallel to the intellectual crisis of Keynesianism and social democracy has occured a crisis of confidence in public service broadcasting (PSB). This has been occasioned not only by the very real budgetary constraints now faced by state broadcasting services,[1] but also by an increased questioning of the legitimacy of the monopoly, or at least priority, of state broadcasting over the airwaves.

In the current policy debate on cable, satellite and broadcasting /relaying developments, the larger issues of economic development and industrial planning seem to be top of the political agenda for European governments.[2] Britain is perhaps the most dramatic European case where public broadcasting has taken a back seat in the formulation of mass communication policy by a government politically committed to privatising nationalised industries in the telecommunications and information processing sectors and facilitating a deregulatory climate in the new media field. In Western Europe generally, cable and satellite are seen as a potential electronic grid, facilitating the convergence of previously discrete telecommunication and information processing systems.

Western governments hail this telematic innovation as being the biggest infrastructural revolution in Europe since the building of the railways, viewing it as a source of economic rejuvenation for their crisis torn economies. Together with the wider electronic industry, cable and satellite systems are seen as the core sector around which industrial restructuring will occur. The development of an electronic grid with application in 'tele-marketing' and vastly expanding the productiity of the commercial service sector (banking, insurence, etc.) via data networking services and, in addition, the expansion of consumer demand for electronic hardware and software, are seen as opening up vast new areas of potentially profitable capital investment.[3] Cable and satellite, it would seem, are simply too big for broadcasters to have a monopoly over them.

Broadcasting policy in Western Europe is then no longer primarily a cultural matter. Increasingly it is subsumed under the wider concerns of national industrial planning and economic strategies which primarily are in turn a response to a global crisis in capitalist economy.

The communications policy of western Europen states is, we would argue, being developed within an environment conditioned by four closely inter-related factors:

1. The technological revolution in the processing, storage and communication of information: the so-called telematic revolution.
2. The dominance of neo-liberal economic ideology in the formation of communications policy in western European states and the U.S..
3. A prolonged period of capitalist economic crisis. This manifests itself in the form of an inflational crisis associated with state interention in the market. But it has its roots in a more fundamental crisis of capital accumulation. This crisis is in turn leading to a process of industrial restructuring around the electronics and information sector, effecting both the labour process and consumption norms.

4. The emergence of a new form of the state-capital relation which sees the state ceding to the market a range of its services. In turn the state seeks new modes of coercive political regulation of civil society an new modes of surveillance over its citiens.

The technological revolution in communications and information processing is the factor most often cited to explain the challenge to PSB. The integration of the previously discreet spheres of computing, telecommunications and video technology is rendered possible by cable and satellite links. This 'networking' whether on a national or an international basis is the core of this 'telematic revolution'.

We are, some argue, now witnessing the end of the broadcasting era. New media technologies, particularly video, cable and data transmission systems, have a capacity for 'narrow casting' to specialist and 'user groups'. Satellite in conjunction with narrow casting media has the ability to overspill national boundaries. It thereby challenges state broadcasting agencies from without, fragmenting national audiences and abolishing traditional monopolies.

Increasingly the 'footprints' of direct broadcast satellites (DBS) spread beyond political boundaries. The volume of transnational data-flows under the control of transnational corporations grows exponentially. Accordingly the capacity of individual nation states to regulate the 'free flow' of information and cultural commodities lessens. In so far as the integrity of nation states rests on a degree of cultural hegemony within their political boundaries, national sovereignty is potentially eroded. Moreover the willingness of a number of European states to regulate the proliferating new media and information technologies seems to be diminishing.

The formation of mass communications policy, traditionally an area characterised by a high degree of regulation, is also being conditioned by a new ideological climate. Neo-liberal economic thinking has sustained a social market doctrine committed to 'rolling back the frontiers of the state' an opening up the entire communication field to the 'contestability of market structures'. A significant number of western governments have enthusiastically espoused this doctrine which directly challenges the public service model dominating state broadcasting policy in capitalist Europe since the 1920's.

However, this anti-statist ideological trajectory didn't materialise out of thin air. It must be understood as a product of the current economic and political conjuncture. It is, we believe, important to understand neo-liberalism as the articulation of a capitalist response to the ongoing world economic crisis. Indeed both the pattern of implementation of the new telematic technologies and the new primacy of a free market doctrine are conditioned by this crisis. Both are circumscribed by the restructuring process by which capital seeks to create the conditions for profitable investment.

At the level of production we are witnessing a major process of industrial restructuring around the electronics and information processing sector dominated by transnational enterprise. The profitability of this sector in turn partly depends on a restructuring of the consumption norms of avanced capitalist society. This entails a commodification of areas previously closed to market relations and a contraction of state provision of collective goods and services. In this new regime of accumulation these goods and services are to be produced by

private enterprise and distributed on a market basis. As Michael Aglietta reminds us (1975:385):

> The decline of so-called keynesian budgetary policies is the necessary consequence of a far reaching restructuration of the norms of social consumption in which the so-called collective resources no longer simply provide the framework for the upsurge of standardized commodities but become a major field in their own right for the expansion of commodity relations in the department producing means of consumption.

The paradox is that despite the rhetoric of laissez-faire many of the European states, including the Republic of Ireland, are themselves presiding over this restructuring of production and consumption. State policies and interventions are increasingly designed to facilitate the emergence of a new regime of capital accumulation based on the greatest possible extension of commodity relations. Yet at the same time state regulation of society, far from withering away, is being expanded. Its focus is being displaced from the field of welfare to that of coercion. As Aglietta argues (ibid:386):

> The overall organization of society within the state by which modern capitalism attempts a solution at the political risk of universalising its political conflicts, evidently gives rise to a strong totalitarian tendency under the ideological cover of liberalism.

As we shall see in the Irish case the new enthusiasm by the Dublin government for the deregulation and liberalisation of mass communication is not accompanied by a parallel concern with ending political censorship and control over the media. The Irish case is not unique.

In much of the recent literature about the telematic revolution there has been a tendency to view the rising tide of neo-liberal ideology in the mass communications field as an intellectual and policy accomodation to an explosion of technological innovation. This is most pronounced in the writings

of the so-called 'information society' theorists. Current telematic developments, it is argued, simply circumvent the state's capacity to regulate them. This form of technological determinism telematic treats telematic innovation as the cause and 'born again' neo-liberalism as the effect, a logic which serves to legitimise the privatisisng and deregulating measures advocated by the 'New Right'.

Conversely many of those who defend PSB do so mainly from a populist, social-democratic standpoint. The new contemporary ideological primacy of the free market doctrine is viewed as the root of the crisis overwhelming PSB. A moral critique of that doctrine is offered rather than a material explanation of its re-emergence and its recent successes in capturing the high ground of state policy. The crisis of PSB is defined as one of moral and political values. Consumerism is subjected to moral disaproval. The anarchy and inequity of the market are compared unfavourably with the benign and rational interventions of the state.

Socialist have been asked to rally around the defense of PSB as a principle. The spectacle of those who several years ago embraced wholeheartedly the Althusserian thesis that the media are a central part of the state's 'ideological apparatus' and as such irredemably reactionary in form and content, now calling for support for PSB is a sobering one.

This apparent dilemma of the social democratic left over PSB - unsure as to whether it should be viewed as an instrument of state domination or a last bulwark against the cultural barbarism of the market - is partly a result of the failure to theorise the state-capital relation. The moralistic discourse which contrasts the vulgarity and inequity of the market with the democratic and

cultivated ideals of public service is no substitute for such a theorization. Much recent critical analysis of media policy has, in our opinion, operated within a false polarity, 'public service versus the market'.

The truth of the matter is of course that the fate of PSB is bound up in a a series of wider systemic changes within the capitalist mode of production. These center on the changing character of the state-capital relation. State organized economic activity, whether in the form of public services or of state productive enterprise, is so completely interwoven with private production that no clear cut dictotomy can be drawn between the public service and the market. As Paul Mattick (1980:3)

> State interventions under a mixed economy find their reasons as well as their limits in the conditions of existence and accumulation of private capital.

The case of Irish economic development, and within this of public service broadcasting, is, we would argue, an instructive one in elucidating the complex relation that obtains between the corporate state, the post war development of a dependent capitalist economy and the field of communications policy. As Mattick again reminds us (ibid:4):

> For historical and other reasons the relationship between state and private production is changeable and moreover, varies from country to country. State enterprise may be turned over to private concerns, and private enterprises may be nationalised; the state may be a shareholder in private concerns or keep them alive through subsidies. The interpenetration of private and state production occurs in a variety of combinations and need not be restricted to the infrastructure. ( ) Yet no matter how much state production may expand , it can never be more than a minor fraction of total production if it is not to call into question the very existence of the market economy. In all countries therefore, a 'mixed economy', to the extent that it is a mixture leaves the private enterprise nature of the economy intact.

BROADCASTING AND THE CORPORATE STATE IN IRELAND

Since the nineteenth century Ireland has been characterized by an uneven form of dependent industrialization. Both the pace and limited extent of industrialization in the country were conditioned by its political and economic domination by British capitalism and by Ireland's peripherality and dependency as regards the British economy. The north-east of the island was the only region of Ireland which experienced a pattern of industrial growth in any way comparable to Britain's. The partition of Ireland in 1921 bequethed an underdeveloped and dependent economy with a weak industrial base to the 26 County Irish 'Free State'. (Meenan 1970.)

It is in this context of the structural weakness of native capital, compounded by the enduring post-colonial dislocations of the dominant agricultural sector, that the Irish state was forced to act and develop a more interventionist economic policy. After 1932 the Twenty Six Counties changed from being one of the least protected to one of the most heavily protected economies in the capitalist world market. (ibid.) The Irish state maintained its preference, however, for a 'balanced budget' and general fiscal rectitude. Right up to the early 1960's when the Irish state committed itself to encouraging an influx of foreign capital and regulating the economy to facilitate this, the ideal objective of the balanced budget was not abandoned. A Keynesian economic logic of reflationary expansion was a long time gaining political adherents in Ireland. On the other hand, the post-1970s' intellectual and political crisis of Keynesianism has not undermined the political support in the popular mind for

maintaining the increasing state regulation of the economy to the same degree as in Britain.

Right up the contemporary period political debates between the two main political parties, Fianna Fail and Fine Gael, on the subject of what was to become known as the 'semi-state sector' (and on state intervention in the economy in general) have been remarkably bi-partisan. As Sean Lemass (1961), the architect of state economic policy of the 1960s, declared in 1961 while Taoiseach (Prime Minister):

> Even the most conservative among us understands why we cannot rely on private enterprise alone; and state enterprise in fields of activity where private enterprise has failed or has shown itself to be disinterested has not only been accepted but is excepted....Nobody thinks of us as doctrinaire socialists.

Throughout the second half of the 1920s, and in particular after 1932, on the basis of the Fianna Fail election victory under de Valera, with a programme for economic self-sufficiency, state intervention in the economy grew. State controlled organisations were established to run insurance, transport, sugar and steel production, industrial and agricultural credit, tourism and many other areas of economic activity. This interventionism developed in response to the twin pressures of the structural weaknesses of native Irish capital and a nationalism which, if now largely conservative in leaning, looked to the new state both as a guarantor of economic prosperity and as a guardian of Ireland's cultural identity. (See Table 1.)

It was in this context of the growing corporate character of Irish society that the broadcasting service developed. A public service ideal, underwritten ideologically by a form of 'official' nationalism commanding wide popular support, became deeply

TABLE 1==========

TOTAL PUBLIC SECTOR EXPENDITURE AS A PERCENTAGE OF GROSS NATIONAL PRODUCT, 1926-84

1926	1930	1934	1939	1946	1951	1962	1971	1974
22.6	21.3	28.9	28.0	23.7	39.2	35.8	43.5	49.1

1978	1979	1980	1981	1984
49.2	51.2	53.6	57.9	60.6

Sources: National Income and Expenditure issues; NESC No.70; NESC No.79

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entrenched in the Irish broadcasting tradition. Populism in Ireland has been deeply imbued with a conservative bourgeois nationalism.

The post war economic boom arrived late in Ireland. After a period of economic stagnation in the 1950's and a severe deflationary crisis in 1956 and 1957, the state began to review the policy of protectionism and economic isolationism followed since the 1930s.[4] The government pinned its hopes for economic recovery on a programme for stimulating growth in industrial output, geared toward external markets. In order to create favourable conditions for export-led growth, the state invested heavily in basic infrastructure (transport and communicatons) and directly encouraged foreign investment with a generous range of grants, loans and other investment incentives. Capital expenditure by the state rose by an impressive 239 per cent in real terms from 1953 to 1975. (See Table 2.)

TABLE 2==========

STATE EXPENDITURE (IN IR£ MILLION)

YEAR	GNP	State Current Expenditure	State Capital Expenditure	Total State Expenditure
1958	600.9	145.4	37.4	182.8
1962	738.8	196.2	58.8	255.0
1966	1073.9	303.6	83.1	386.7
1970	1648.5	546.1	157.7	703.8
1974	2968.5	1091.1	411.9	1503.1
1978	6403.4	2667.6	943.1	3610.7
1984b	14673.0	7060.0	1040.4	8100.4

Source: National Income and Expenditure issues.
b=budget estimate

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By 1977, 680 new industrial projects had been set up by state-aided overseas companies, representing a dramatic level of capital penetration by multinational corporations. Between 1961 and 1979 the share of total employment of 'new' foreign firms rose from 1 to 26 per cent (Though this was almost entirely at the expense of indigenous firms which went to the wall under conditions of international competition).[5] Within this new sector U.S. capital was now predominant.

State intervention had spectacular pay-offs in a period which saw both the rapid expansion of world trade and the growth of multinational capital seeking new areas for profitable investment. In the 1960's GNP grew in real terms more than twice the rate of the 1950's. Investment, hitherto a weak point in the Irish economy, increased from 15 per cent of GNP in the 1950s to as much as 24 per cent by the end of the 1960s. Ireland, a small open economy, was now fully integrated into the world market. It signed the General Agreement on Tarrifs and Trade (GATT) in 1960.

One year later it applied to join the European Economic Community (EEC), finally gaining accession with Britain and Denmark in 1973. Some of the fruits of the post war economic boom capital began to come Ireland's way.

IRISH TELEVISION

It was in this climate of economic optimism - the so-called 'Irish Economic Miracle' - that the television service was launched. Ireland, thrust with the help of state intervention and multinational capital into a belated industrial revolution, was meeting the future with a new self-assurence. The 'lift off' to an apparently irreversible dynamic of modernisation seemed to have been achieved. A basically rural and conservative society was being propelled into the modernity of consumer capitalism. 'Televison' like 'youth' (and Ireland had and has the fastest growing population in Europe) became a metaphor for the vast social changes sweeping the country. Mass communications were indeed playing an important role in shifting traditional attitudes and facilitating the appearance of new consumption norms much more closely integrated with the capitalist market economy. Television was both conditioned by, and in turn sustained, these social and economic changes. RTE became the flagship for the expansive Irish state.

Television as a public service developed, therefore, in a period of economic growth in Ireland presided over by the state but dependent on multinational capital. Indeed this growth could only be sustained by massive subventions by government to foreign capital - a strategy not without its ideological contradictions. (see Wickham in Morgan (ed.) 1980.)

During the 1960's public expenditure grew substantially faster than the growth in GNP - its proportion of GNP rising from 33 per cent in 1960 to well over 50 percent in the 1970's. The level of investment was extremely high by international standards with Ireland usually coming second behind Japan in the OECD tables on the ratio of Gross investment to GNP. The high level of state spending was only possible through deficit financing - involving in turn high levels of borrowing. Between 1961 and 1974, for instance, deficits on the government's combined current and capital account rose from £29.7 million to £178.4 million. By 1985 foreign indebtedness stood at 128 per cent of GNP, the highest for any OECD country. (Irish Times, May 24, 1985.) The corosponding growth in the money supply resulted in high inflation rates, the highest in Europe. The interventions of the state in the capitalist economy are not without their contradictions in so far as, in the long term, state expenditures become a burden on capitalist profitability.

The legal and administrative basis for the new television service was established in the Broadcasting Act (1960) which empowered the government to set up a Broadcasting Authority to run Radio Eireann and Telefis Eireann (later Radio Telefis Eireann). This transferred responsibility for day to day running of broadcasting from the Minister for Posts and Telegraphs. The new authority was thus formally free from civil service and government control. On paper at least it enjoyed a degree of independence which made the Reithian-inspired ideal of broadcasting as a public service attainable for the first time. However, a conservative cultural nationalism rather than social democratic rhetoric ideologically underwrote this expansion of

broadcasting.

In reality, as with The British model, the government exercised control through its control over the purse strings. Since RTE was not legally permitted to raise its own equity financing, the station found itself subject to the politically motivated whims of the Department of Finaance for funding. The state controlled and continues to control, the following areas:

- capital funding of the service, usually in the form of a repayable grant from the exchequer;
- the level of license fees and their collection by the Dept. of P & T. Since 1975 the Minister has referred requests for licence fee rises to the National Prices Commission. These have, in the past number of years, been pegged below the level of inflation. RTE have reckoned they lose over £6 million a year through this collection system. Ireland has the highest rate of evasion in Europe (estimated at 19 per cent in 1983-84) and the highest relative cost of collection;
- the cost of advertising, again pegged below the rate of inflation for the past number of years;
- the quantity of advertising permitted on the air (at present seven-and-a-half minutes per hour maximum on television).

As such, RTE finds itself constrained within the wider political objectives and economic constraints of the Irish state. In the 1960s, in a period of expanding government expenditures and growth in the size and significance of the state sponsored sector, the attention of broadcasters was focussed on the political constraints[6] placed on the new service by a government reluctant to grant broadcasting the autonomy it demanded. However, since 1974 (the recession of that year hit the vulnerable Irish economy particularly hard), economic growth slowed down dramatically - between 1982 and 1984 GNP grew at less than one per cent per annum.[7] Accordingly within broadcasting policy there has been a shift of attention to the economic terrain.

If the launching of television occurrred at a time of economic confidence, so the introduction of the second RTE

television and radio channels coincided with the end of the long post-war boom. As economic growth has slowed down, public expenditure has continued to rise, plunging the Irish state into a fiscal crisis only temporarily relieved by foreign borrowing. (See Table 3) With real GDP virtually flat, the unemployment rate had increased to over 17 per cent by early 1986. Despite a series of deflationary budgets aimed at controlling the public finances and endless political rhetoric about the necessity for fiscal restraint, the Exchequer borrowing requirement is expected to remain at about 13 per cent of GNP, with total government expenditure still consuming over half of national income by 1986.

TABLE 3

PUBLIC SECTOR BORROWING AND THE IRISH ECONOMY, 1953-1982
(AVERAGE ANNUAL AMOUNTS OVER FOUR YEAR PERIODS)

	1953-57	1958-62	1963-67	1968-72	1973-77	1978-82
National income (£m)	451.2	557.9	808.1	1,341.5	3,109.6	7,068.9
Bal. payments deficit (£m)	10.6	4.5	19.2	54.0	150.7	870.2
Public borrowing (£m)	34.1	34.2	57.3	108.8	527.5	1,829.2
Dept servicing cost (£m)	18.3	25.1	41.1	83.3	312.1	1,035.7
Bal. payments def. as % nat. income	2.35	0.81	2.38	4.03	4.85	12.31
Debt servicing as % nat. income	4.06	4.50	5.09	6.21	10.04	14.65

Source: National Income and Expenditure, various years, 1960-81; Central Bank of Ireland, Annual Report, 1983.

As with other state-sponsored bodies, RTE has been starved of investment. Since 1978 it has been expected to run two television and radio channels on a budget not substantially larger than it received for running one. After substantial falls in domestic demand in the past few years (as real disposable incomes have shrunk), advertising revenues are static if not falling. Licence fees have only recently been raised after remaining static for two years.

In addition to the threat to its audience posed by the four British channels, the rise in the home video market has made further inroads into RTE's audience. Not unnaturally RTE views the possible development of pay-as-you-view and narrowcasting services with considerable trepidation. Commercial cable and satellite channel would undoubedtly make further inroads into it's share of a static advertising market. In addition, if developed on the U.S. model, cable would lead to an atomisation of the national audience. This, RTE believes, would make the the defence of the PSB ideal hard to sustain. (Fisher 1982.) In turn, RTE argues, standards of broadcasting would almost certainly fall.

THE CONTEMPORARY CRISIS IN IRISH PSB

The consequence of RTE's revenue squeeze has been a curtailment of the most expensive aspect of RTE's output, namely its own productions. Most other expenditure on staff and overheads is fixed. The average cost per hour, including transmission costs, of a home produced programme is some £22,000. Cost per hour for a bought in programme is, on the other hand,

around £3,000. There are wide variations in cost and output. An hour of sport costs £7,000 with 584 hours of output while an hour's drama costs £181,000 with 21 hours output. (See Appendix 1.) RTE's average 35% rate of home produced programmes is the lowest in the European Broadcasting Union and half the figure for the BBC. (See Table 4.) Such a low rate of home production undermines RTE's traditional claims to be a guardian of the national culture and hence its public service claims in so far as these are dependent on this political objective.

TABLE 4

Percentage Home Productions

RTE	35
BBC	70
EBU Average	50

Source: SKC

In addition as home produced programmes generally top the TAM ratings they are most likely to produce and enhance advertising revenue. The result of revenue squeeze, however, is a vicious circle steadily constraining RTE home productions. This has produced a book-keeping mentality in RTE over the past number of years. Indeed the management of cash flow often appeared the sole criterion of executive action. Despite this RTE has not, however, been successful in staving off debt and decline. From 1980 RTE has generated an insufficient surplus with which to meet its

present obligations and future planned expenditure (see appendix 2). Between 1980 and 1984 expenditure grew 81 per cent while income grew by only 74 per cent. Outflows exceeded internally generated cash flow by £14.2m (see appendix 3).

Accordingly to finance its capital programme RTE was forced to resort to bank overdrafts since, unlike other semi-state bodies, RTE does not receive state equity financing. The net bank position worsened by £7.9m over this period with an increase in net bank borrowings of approximately £6m. RTE has indeed even borrowed from its own employees' pension fund in an attempt to balance the books! The cumulative effects of a number of years of under provision have been low staff morale, pessimistic self questioning of the whole ethos of PSB, and (since it is in the classical sense the 'administration of scarcity') a bloated and increasingly inefficient management bureaucracy.

There can be little doubt that effective ministerial control over RTE's budget has, as in the case of the BBC in Britain, been used as a lever of state political control over the content of public service broadcasting. As the chairperson of the Dublin Broadcasting Branch of the NUJ has argued:

> It seems that the government's interests are to keep the station in a subservient easily controllable position. As long as RTE is financially under-provided it can't create too much trouble. (Sunday Tribune, Aug. 18, 1985)

Today perhaps as never before in Ireland PBS is under threat. It is experiencing a profound crisis not only in its finances but in its ideological legitimation.

Recent policy developments in relation to three areas of broadcasting will indicate the character of this crisis:

1. SATELLITE:

On the 19th of September, 1985 by the Coalition Minister for Communications, Jim Mitchell, announced his decision to Ireland's Direct Broadcast by Satellite (DBS) franchise to a private company, Atlantic Satellites, headed by Wexford entrepeneur, Jim Stafford. The latter is closely associated with the U.S. Hughes Communications Corporation, itself a recently acquired subsidiary of the giant General Motors Corporation. Hughes, a U.S. "defence electronics giant" whose "high-tech electronics and weapons systems have prompted defence experts to gushingly dub it a national asset" (Fortune, July 8, 1985), will build the Irish satellite and will arrange launch by the U.S. Space Shuttle. The Irish satellite system will play a key role in U.S. attempts to circumvent the Intelsat monopoly and breakdown resistance of EEC member states to U.S. led telecommunications deregulation.

2. REVIEW OF RTE:

One day later on the 20th of September the Irish government published the private consultants' report on Radio Telefis Eireann (RTE) it had commissioned from Stokes Kennedy Crowley (SKC). The minister promised subsequent implementation of SKC's recommended actions for a measure of privatisation of RTE as a response to the financial problems of the public broadcasting service.

3. LOCAL RADIO

Concurrently a Local Radio Bill was before the Dail which attempts to introduce a large measure of privatisation of local radio. It outlines the setting up of a Local Radio Authority to grant broadcasting franchises to about seven commercial operators to cover the commercially viable areas of the state. The Authority would be an effectively toothless body since the operators would have ownership of transmission equipment. A 'second Tier' for 'Community' provision is also envisaged. Again, however, commercial principles will predominate since no state monies are to be provided.

The reason for the congruence of these apparently discrete political events can be sought in a number of factors. In the rest of this paper we examine these policy developments in detail and situate them within the changing relation between the Irish corporate state and transnational capital.

THE DBS DECISION

There was some surprise that a little known company headed by an individual without previous broadcasting experience[8] was given an agreement in principle to take charge of the next great technological leap-forward in Irish broadcasting. The decision seemed all the more surprising since RTE itself, in a consortium with (amongst others) the state owned telecommunications service, An Bord Telecom, was also in competition for the DBS franchise. The main headline lead in the Irish Times on Sept. 19, 1985 read "Telecom and RTE passed over for satellite licence".

It soon became clear is that the Irish based Atlantic Satellites, which made the original franchise bid, is clearly a shop front for the giant U.S. Hughes Communications and its parent, Hughes Aircraft. Indeed Hughes dominated the franchise battle from the start, arriving in Dublin in October 1984 to commandeer Department of Communications officials for a day-long presentation on the Atlantic case and other matters.

It is not surprising therefore that more recently Hughes has finally stepped in and taken complete control of Atlantic with an 80 per cent holding (Irish Press, March 3, 1986). Stafford, the former Chairperson of Atlantic, remains on the board as a purely figure-head non-executive chairperson. The rest of the Atlantic board now consists of the chairperson, vice-chairperson, chief-executive and president, plus vice-president of Hughes Communications. Atlantic in its previous guise never amounted to anything more than a £7.00 down payment for company registration at the Companies Office in Dublin.[9]

Significantly, from the outset of its negotiations with the Irish state, Hughes emphasised the commercial importance of telecommunications over tv usage of the satellite for cultural purposes. An Irish government anxious as ever to attract multinational capital were happy to listen. The result was that the Irish government's application for satellite frequencies specify bands in that part of the spectrum reserved for telecommunications and not the DBS frequencies. The lower frequencies can be used for TV from lower powered 75 watt satellite transmissions instead of the more usual 200 watt DBS. The former are more attractive to private investors who believe the more high powered DBS plans of Britain, France and others to be uneconomic. The Irish proposal is geared toward Ireland's satellite being the telematic gateway between Europe and the U.S.A.. It hopes to supply the lucrative North Atlantic market in telecommunications and data transmission business which will emerge with the ending of the multilateral Intelsat monopoly on telecommunications.

Dianna Lady Dougan, the U.S. Under Seretary for Telecommunications Policy, who has recently been on a whistle-stop tour of EEC member states attempting to mobilise political support for deregulation of European telecommunications and broadcasting systems declared, after a meeting with the Irish Minister for Communications, that she saw

> Ireland as providing a vanguard, a push into European telecommunications policy along the lines of further deregulation. (Speech at NIHE Dublin, 6th April 1986.)

The Irish satellite with its orbit at 31 degrees west is strategically placed, with a 'footprint' extending from Greece to Denver, Colorado, to serve the North Atlantic route. The Irish

state, with its traditional subservience to U.S. multinationals, has been identified by U.S. State Department strategists as a possible, in the Under Secretary's words, "Delaware State Corporation" (ibid) - indicating a location without public authority controls on private business activity. The Irish developments are viewed as potentially driving a wedge into EEC regulatory frameworks by providing a European partner for the planned U.S. private enterprise satellite system, thereby busting the Intelsat monopoly.[10]

This type of policy development is perfectly in line with the recent historic client role of the Irish state in relation to multinational, particularly U.S., capital. Not surprisingly the European vice-president of Hughes, a Mr. Kochler, was fulsome in his praise of Department of Communications officials, whom he described as "a very impressive group". Similarly he gleefully gives the regulative policy of the Irish state the 'thumbs-up':

> The country is committed to having a first class telecommunications system and from our understanding is in favour of promoting competitive approaches. (Business and Finance, February 27, 1986)

Meanwhile the Irish state is upgrading the basic national telecommunications infrastructure through switching from analog to digital exchanges. Supply of peripherals in the form of consumer hardware and software is being opened out meanwhile to private enterprise. This process is combined with the asset stripping of even the revenue side of the semi-state telecommunications service by the government in order to pay-off the national debt. This in turn is preventing comprehensive investment by Bord Telecom.[11]

At a global level the recent takeover of Hughes Communications itself by General Motors (GM) Corporation is an illustration of the re-structuring of a long-standing multinational around newer electronics based information technology industries. There is severe price competition on auto-manufacture as a result of over-capacity. We are witnessing the integration of micro-electronics computer-diagnostics systems into motor manufature, which GM sees as "potentially the heart of a car".(Fortune, July 8, 1985) GM is seeking to boost its corporate profitability by diversifying into the new military based GM/Hughes Electronics subsidiary, of which Hughes Communications is now a part.

As we know the role of the U.S. state's military spending is an essential factor in subsidizing R+D of multinationals and bolstering the aggregate corporate profitability of U.S. capitalism. It also enhances U.S. military hegemony on a world scale. Fully 50 per cent of U.S. Research & Development originates in defence allocation. Satellite manufacturing and research developments illustrate how a military led technology is being pushed into the commercial telecommunications and entertainment sector to provide the basis for a new sphere of profitable investment.

The Irish satellite is indicative of a complex set of relations between state and capital. We have, on the one hand, the U.S. Federal State and its partnership with U.S. multinationals in the electronics, aerospace and communication areas, built around the defence axis. This military/industrial complex in turn is in a relation to the corporate states and telecommunications agencies of the countries host to U.S. multinational capital. This complex pattern of state capital

relations cannot be reduced to a simplictic dichotomy: public service versus the market.

The potential five television channels planned for the Irish system are a minimal part of the Hughes venture as there will be twenty four other transponders available for lease, subject to ultimate Irish government approval. The Irish satellite could provide video-conferencing links between U.S. and European branches of large corporations because its footprint extends to the eastern seaboard of the USA. Atlantic will be in competition for these and other facilities with other European DBS ventures seeking the attentions of the estimated potential 50 to 100 customers. The venture, therefore, remains a high risk one.

In terms of the television programming itself Atlantic candidly state that "trash is inevitable". (Irish Times, Sept. 20, 1985) A source close to the company admitted this was a "commercial venture, not a cultural one" (ibid). The television stations will be advertising driven with advertisers aiming their products at the widest possible market. This will mean advertising from multinational corporations aimed at Britain and part of the continent. This is likely to affect programming which will probably consist of a diet similar to the endless round of pop-videos, re-runs of American soap-operas and police dramas which strongly feature on Rupert Murdoch's presently operating Sky Channel DBS.

There is also the question of whether there will be enough 'product' or actual marketable programmes to go round. This gap may be filled by the numbers of independent production companies which are expected to appear. Significantly in the Irish case a central recommendation of the SKC report was that an independent

spearheaded by forces outside of journalism. This is possibly because of an atmosphere within RTE not dissimilar to the McCarthy anti-communist scare in NBC and CBS in the 1950's.

A combination of events such as the effect of the H Block hunger strike campaign and Sinn Fein election victories from 1981 onwards and the BBC 'Real Lives' controversy have conspired, however, to temper this atmosphere. The latter has acted as a catalyst in motivating Irish broadcast journalists. It was on the weekend after the banning of the 'Real Lives' programme, 'Edge Of The Union,' and subsequent industrial action by British journalists that RTE station and newsroom management banned an interview with Martin Galvin of the U.S. Noraid organisation. This group is not itself mentioned by the Section 31 ban. This ban precipitated the first 24 national hour stoppage against censorship by NUJ staff since the jailing of RTE journalist Kevin O'Kelly for contempt 14 years previously. It also provided the momentum, alongside the activities of the Repeal Section 31 Committee, for a similar stoppage on the occasion of the annual renewal of the ministerial directive in January 1986.[21]

While these actions have been occuring parallel to the concern about the threat to PSB it is to be hoped that they can be incorporated into a defence of a more open and democratic public service model. Unless the question of more open access to the airwaves is addressed by media workers the defence of PSB is already seriously compromised. Since the champions of the private sector are long on 'freedom' it is necessary for those who defend public ownership to draw up a model of real pluralism free from the dictates of either commercial or state control.

production sector should be set up alongside RTE. This would not only supply RTE itself (with 'cost effective programming') but also the DBS market. SKC also specifically recommended that RTE not be given the DBS franchise. Its integration into the developing international market for television would be solely at the level of programme making and sales, and at the behest of the multinational holder of the electronic hardware. The role of state companies like RTE and Telecom in providing future DBS services depends on the action Atlantic condescend to take on a letter from minister Mitchell "asking" them to consider RTE and Bord Telecom. RTE may find itself with a purely distributive function with regard to the DBS service. Both the SKC and the DBS decisions have to be seen as part of the global process in which the intertwining of culture and capital is being facilited by the interventions of nation states guided by neo-liberal policy programmes.

THE SKC REPORT

At one level this report can be seen as nothing more innocuous than the tidying up of a rather cumbersome and inefficient corporate bureaucratic structure. It could be seen as an attempt to streamline an ageing semi-state albatross, hide-bound by a ponderous management structure and an over-staffed workforce maintaining out of date demarcation divisions to its own advantage. In our opinion this would be a superficial reading of the report. The hidden agenda and unstated 'solution' to RTE's problems is a move towards privatising sectors of its activities.

Significantly the nine person SKC team undertaking the investigation contained four British consultants from SKC's international partners, Peat Marwick of London. They had been part of a similar investigation into the BBC earlier in 1985. Two of them were also involved in setting up the business side of Britain's latest Commercial tv station, Channel 4. Peat Marwick's investigation into the BBC contained thirty recommendations, twenty-eight of which have been acted on. These have resulted in the contracting out of one quarter of the BBC's services (such as security, catering and the engineering equipment development division) to the private sector. The amount of programme staff on temporary contract is budgeted to rise from 10 to 25 per cent of the workforce. This in itself will affect over 1,000 staff. The overall workforce is due to be cut by four thousand to twenty-two thousand. The official rationale is premised on the need to "bring new talent into programme fields". (Financial Times, July 18,1985.) In fact the decision was precipitated by the British government's decision grant an insufficient license fee increase (ibid). A more flexible managerial structure and job demarcation system was also recommended.

These and other themes are repeated in the report on RTE. The report specifically places RTE within what it identifies as the changing environment for PSB in Europe. The EBU's ad hoc group report on the future of PSB is quoted. This environment is sketched: the end of the distribution monopoly as a result of DBS/cable development; the uncertain financing of PSB; the envisaged shift in broadcaster/viewer relationship due to increased choice and the emergence of the commercial importance of transmission and performing rights. The 'shifts' seen to be

emerging are identified:

- from monopoly to pluralism and competition
- from national to international
- from uniformity to diversity of techniques and systems
- from regulation to deregulation
- from homogeneity to fragmentation of audience
- from central transmission to regional and local
- from centralised production facilities to programme production cost advantage favouring relatively small video production centres. (SKC:5)

The dominant feature of this list is the conjoining of pluralism and competition. This of course ignores completely the historically verified global trend of competition leading to monopoly. As we well know in the media/entertainment sector huge conglomerates comprising, press, broadcasting, recording, film production, satellite and aerospace holdings predominate. The success of the Hughes Corporation in securing the Irish satellite franchise is but one indication of the dominance of multinational capital in the communications field.

At the heart of the SKC report is the concept of the 'profit centre'. This aims to introduce market relations into the heart of RTE. The established practise within RTE had been to regard facilities divisions which provide production resources like cameras, O.B, archives, studios, etc., as a free service. The goal now is to turn them into internally contained 'profit centres' which cost all their responsibilities to programmes. In this way a profit and loss sheet can be produced for them. SKC recommends that RTE move from direct programme costing (DPC) to a total costing method which would integrate the present fixed costs of facilities. The advantages from the SKC point of view include a further reduction in staffing as well as salary levels by subjecting them to the dictates of the market through a direct cost comparison 'market contestability'. The implication is that

the 'unseen hand' of the market place will apportion value in relation to efficiency and competitive performance.

This is an attempt in economic terms to 'internalise externalities' or to commoditise that which has historically been treated as a 'public good'. There will then be a direct point of comparison between RTE and private enterprise. The ultimate goal is to make these departments compete with the private sector. Profitable areas can be creamed off and returned to the private market.

Such a scenario can break-down trade-union strength since an outside non-unionised firm could be more competitive on the basis of lower wage costs. In turn an investment starved RTE supplier of programme services could lose out to more capital intensive competitors who focus narrowly on the profitable sectors of RTE's overall activity. This is not a forgone conclusion though it is a reasonable speculation, on the basis of international trends. In response to this threat RTE management is already engaged in an attempt to break down hitherto existing levels of inter- and intra-union solidarity in order restructure the organization in line with the SKC recommendations. There is a direct point of comparison with the situation of print workers who are confronted by a new technology which both reduces employment and lowers relative wage levels and which has a tendency toward de-skilling and restrucuring the workforce around new methods of management discipline.[12]

INDEPENDENT PRODUCTION

It is not only in relation to production facilities that a measure of privatisation is being proposed. It is also proposed at the central level of programme-making itself. The new management structure has separate posts of overall Director of Television Programmes regulating the activities of a Programme Controller (responsible for specifically RTE productions), Channel Controller (responsible for overall scheduling) and Administration Manager (SKC 1985:34). The post of Channel Controller effectively ensures that the Programme Controller is in competition with outside interests[13] since the former can obtain programmes by either:-

* In-House Production
* Co-Production
* Commission
* Acquisition

The preferred option is one in which the Channel Controller

> be free to seek competing bids from independent programme makers.... (ibid:36)

The proposals have the virtue, at least as far as its proponents are concerned, of appearing to open up access to RTE while also reducing costs and encouraging a rise in the level of 'home produced' programmes. These, it is planned, will increasingly be produced by the 'independent' sector. Up to this juncture the term 'home produced programmes' was, with minor exceptions, synonymous with RTE-made programmes. The independent sector in Ireland has historically been thought of as a genuine small creative sector generally too innovative for the constrictions inherent in the old RTE public service environment. However, this more or less artisanal group is rapidly giving way to an emergent

profit oriented sector with its eyes firmly fixed on a combination of the business video promotional and training market and the international film and video market.[14]

Indeed the aftermath of the SKC report has seen a number of long-standing RTE personnel breaking away from the station to set up their own production companies. They have negotiated advantageous severence agreements for themselves alongside contractual arrangements with RTE to make programmes for periods initially of up to five years. This 'brain drain' will also help denude RTE of programme making talent. It is effectively a subsidy to the private sector since RTE invested in the training and hoped to benefit from the experience of such staff.[15]

SKC refer to the Channel 4 experience in Britain on a number of occasions, both as an example of competitive costing comparison and as an example of the expansion and encouragement of 'diversity'. The model is also often on the tongues of RTE producers and newspaper commentators. The inception of Channel 4 and the programme innovations it spearheaded has had a powerful effect on the thinking of RTE producers and presenters who felt inhibited by the steadily more stultified atmosphere of RTE.

However, as is now recognized, within Channel 4 itself the free ranging innovations of the early days have been largely curtailed and excused as the forgivable excesses of youth. Many of the independent production companies set up in expectation of on-going commisions from Channel 4 have found the absence of guaranteed continuity a burden which does not justify large initial capital outlays. Some companies, like Brook Productions, are not having commissions renewed (Listener, February 20, 1986) while others, like Diverse Productions' the Friday Alternative,

have been effectively censored or had their reason d'etre transformed (A True Diversity, Broadcast, October3, 1983).[16]

Garnham (1983:25) points out that the energy and idealism which went into the campaign for Channel 4

> has led to a result which in the medium to long-term has weakened public service broadcasting.... The cries of pain from independent producers at the 'interference' and tough contractual terms imposed by Channel 4 already demonstrate that such a model is incompatible with the regular flow of product such a channel requires to hold its audience and with the power that control of a scarce national distribution system necessarily gives. At the same time these producers will discover that by escaping the relatively protected environment of the BBC and ITV companies they have obtained the freedom to be exploited on the international market.

There is little to suggest that the independent sector in Ireland with its chronic lack of investment capital and small domestic market will fare any better in an international marketplace dominated by the U.S. film and video industry.

In addition the degree of political control and censorship over programme content and treatment experienced by independents in Ireland is likely to be much greater. The evidence suggests that the state, which traditionally has exercised a high degree of political control over public service broadcasting, is now seeking to extend its power to politically regulate the content of the media into the economically deregulated media.

For the 'New Right' in Ireland as elsewhere the abandoning of state interventions in the market place in no way entails the extension of political freedoms of speech and rights of access with regard to the new media channels. On the contrary it involves a search for new modes of social control. Broadcasting in the Republic of Ireland, throughout a history coterminous with the existence of the state itself, has always been subject to extensive political control. This has been exercised in the form

of direct legislative intervention in programming content or, more subtly, by control of funding - as we have detailed earlier.

The most extreme form of censorship arose with the emergence of the crisis in the north of Ireland, the political crisis of the original Partition settlement of 1921. As civil unrest grew RTE's coverage became the subject of legislatively based censorship of news and current affairs. Section 31 of the Broadcasting Act empowered the Minister for Communications to 'direct' RTE not to broadcast 'a certain class' of material, the nature of which was to be specified in an 'order'. The first order in October 1971 prohibited the broadcasting of

> any matter that could be calculated to promote the aims and activities of any organization which engages in, encourages or advocates the attaining of any political objective by violent means.17

The very vagueness of the original directive which did not specify a particular application to the northern conflict, nor, until 1976, actually name the prohibited groups and parties led to a developing climate of self-censorship among RTE journalists. It also led to an increasing level of hierarchical editorial control within an increasingly bureaucratised RTE.

Self-censorhip got a kick-start in 1972 after the sacking of the entire RTE Authority for supporting an RTE journalist, Kevin O'Kelly, judged by the government to have breached Section 31. The journalist in question reported on an interview he had with the alleged Chief of Staff of the IRA and was later jailed for contempt for failing to identify the latter, then charged with IRA membership, in court. A new more compliant Authority was instituted in its place.

There can be little doubt that the 'Troubles' have once again placed the unresolved 'National Question' on the political agenda in the Republic - despite the evident unease of constitutional nationalist parties about the whole issue. Indeed it is precisely the deep ambivalence of those parties to political developments in a part of the island to which the Republic's constitution lays formal territorial claim that has conditioned governmment scrutiny of those areas of the media it can control.

In the contemporary period recession, rising unemployment (now at over 17 per cent of the workforce) and cuts in welfare expenditure are undermining the legitimacy of government. The increased political strength of militant republicanism in the shape of Sinn Fein, in both the north and the south, conditions the government's paranoia about their access to the media. Section 31 is a 'catch-all' form of legislation which bans any spokesperson from Sinn Fein, elected or not, from speaking over the air on any subject whatever, even on seemingly mundane local constituents' problems.

Section 31 has had the enduring effect of securing the compliance of broadcasters and the general poublic to a generally reactionary pattern of media representation of the world. An "ultra cautious atmosphere" has steadily pervaded the news-room. As one RTE journalist put it

> enquiries into controversial issues have not been encouraged. Establishment views.... are aired at length, often without analysis or counterpoint. There is now a general anxiety about tackling stories which might embarrass the government on the issue of security. (in Meehan 1986:6)

A gradual system of editorial reference upwards was grafted on to the government directive, generating a system of self-censorship. Up to the mid-'70's journalists and producers who

attempted to circumvent censorship were transferred to less contentious departments. Under the post-1973 minister, Conor Cruise O'Brien, the atmosphere became increasingly stifling. It is in this context of a state and broadcasting service without independent traditions and professional strength to the same extent as those of its British neighbour that the privatisation of broadcasting can appear to some commentators as a potentially progressive development. Some on the left argue that the ending of the state monopoly over the airwaves might facilitate access to a wider spectrum of political opinion.

The precedents in Ireland for such a liberalising development are not, however, too auspicious. It may not be generally known that Ireland has an illegal pirate radio problem second in Europe to Italy. Commercial stations with substantial advertising revenues[18] broadcast daily on regularised frequencies, parasitically lifting news material from the national stations and from newspapers - with no government interference. There is evidence that specific politicians from the two main parties, Fianna Fail and Fine Gael, with business interests in the media and advertising fields have connived in this systematic illegality. Indeed a government minister personally introduced a programme on pirate radio!

Although completely illegal under the Wireless and Telegrphy and Broadcasting acts governments have exercised extreme tolerance over the emergence of this profitable area of cultural merchandising which it now hopes to regularise in the form of a long awaited Local Radio Bill. This finally abolishes the RTE monopoly in radio and simultaneously extends censorship control to private stations.[19]

The double standard of the state with regard to deregulation was nowhere more apparent than in its threat to the illegal Radio Leinster in 1982. Mr. Gavin Duffy, a producer on this illegal station, took his mission of 'openning up the airwaves' rather too literally. He planned to interview Gerry Adams and Danny Morrison of Sinn Fein togethor with Ken Livingstone, leader of the Greater London Council. Before transmission, however, the Department of Communications dispatched a ministerial Mercedes with an extraordinary letter stating that:

> if the broadcast went ahead it would constitute a criminal offence...this would be taken into account in reviewing applications for a broadcasting license. (Irish Times, December 24, 1982)

Since the entire enterprise was of course illegal and could have had its equipment confiscated at any time it is instructive that the state chose only to intervene with dubious legality (Section 31 only applies to RTE) in order to curtail freedom of expression. Put simply contravention of the law in favour of commercial advantage is tolerated while a contravention in support of democratic rights is immediately curtailed.

The hapless Mr. Duffy was summarily and unceremoniously sacked by a managing director anxious to convince 'the right people and the minister' (ibid) that the the pirates wish simply to be 'responsible', though regretfully not quite legal, members of the broadcasting establishment. Significantly the only case of the state determinedly 'jamming' a pirate signal is in the short history of the ill-fated 'Radio H Block' around the same period. Confusion on this matter will soon abate, however, since the privatising Local Radio Bill will contain its own Section 31 censorship clause in the form of a Section 35![20]

In a similar way we might expect that the retention of the public service control over the national distribution system will facilitate the extension of the control of the Irish state over the independent production sector. This process is observed to be will under way in Britain in the relation between Channel 4 and its independent contributors. (cf. n.16.)

The majority of RTE staff are actively committed to the public ownership of media and cultural resources. They are acutely conscious of the threat posed by extensive plans to privatise sectors of RTE and are campaigning through their trade unions against this. However, the political debate, such as it is, has been couched in terms of a largely uncritical defence of PSB.

The trade union defence of PSB has been based too often on a simple populism. It has been asserted by some RTE defenders of PSB that RTE was the "only" television station "in the world" which allowed ordinary people to speak for themselves! The populist position presents RTE as a folksy tv station steeped in the trials, tribulations, verities and traditions of 'ordinary Irish folk'. PSB's claim to be the unmediated reflection of the national culture is not only an anachronistic, a-political, and utterly provincial representation but it also is an extremely misleading one. All sections of the Irish populace do not have equal access to broadcasting - the existing pattern of overt and self censorship ensures that this is not the case. In addition the dependence of RTE on foreign programming to fill its schedules seriously impairs its claim to be the guardian of Irish cultural identity. The litmus test of the seriousness of Irish broadcaster's own defence of public service provision must, we

argue, be their willingness to fight against state censorship as exercised by Section 31 of the Broadcasting Act. Sadly such a committment has waivered.

There was little action taken against Section 31 from about the middle '70's to the early 1980's. When the issue was addressed NUJ spokespersons from the RTE Newsroom objected to the legislation on the basis that they were quite capable of 'dealing' with spokespersons from the Republican Movement over the air without its aid. It was suggested that there be a one year moratorium on Section 31 in order to show the government that journalists could be trusted to be 'responsible'. In other words the issue of free speech and the basic democratic rights of the audience to hear, and Republicans to publicly express their point of view, was not regarded as an issue. The evidence suggests that RTE staff, under intense political pressure from management succumbed to an effective self-censorship. Programmes dealing with the northern crisis were produced as though Section 31 and its attendent constraints were a naturalised aspect of the production landscape.

It is still the case that programmes dealing with the North of Ireland only infrequently mention that they cannot interview members of Sinn Fein or the IRA. It is mainly at unavoidable junctures like election time that the reason for the non-appearence of Sinn Fein gets a mention. There are regular panel discussions with elected representatives where only Sinn Fein are not represented and where there is no mention of censorship. This is even the case where Sinn Fein themselves are the topic of discussion. The first successful ongoing campaign against Section 31, the Repeal Section 31 Committee set up in 1985, was

REFERENCES

1 RTE, the state broadcasting service of the Irish Republic, had a current account deficit of £2.8 million in 1982 with a total income of £56.4 million; long-term indebtedness was the equivelent of 80 per cent of total assets.

2 As the report of the British government Infromation Technology Advisory Panel declared in 1981: "We believe cable to be an essential component of future communications systems, offering great opportunities for new forms of entrepeneurial activity and substantial direct and indirect industrial benefits." (ITAP 1982:para 8:5)

3 As Timothy Hollins in Beyond Broadcasting:Into the Cable Age (BFI, London, 1984:29) comments: "Throughout the recession ridden western world there is a widespread belief that cable and information technology could be important economic rejuvinators. Publicly this is described as a long-term objective; privately it is hoped cable might act as a short-term stimulant, creating new industries, new jobs and new export opportunities."

4 Between 1953 and 1958, when the rest of capitalist Europe was enjoying an unprecedented boom, industrial employment actually fell in Ireland from 228,403 to 210,324 persons. National income rose only 0.5 per cent per annum during this period. The drain of emigration (stemming originally from the 1 million deaths in the Great Famine in 1845 and the reducing through emigration of the remaining population from 7 to 4 million persons) especially accelerated during this period.

5 In fact the figure is probably higher due to the perverse propensity - though it does have an ideological function - on the part of the state agency responsible for approving grant packages, the Industrial Development Authority (IDA), for reclassifying foreign firms as 'domestic' after a certain period. (See O'Malley, 1980)

6 The Taoiseach, Sean Lemass, referred to RTE in the Dail in 1965 as "an instrument of public policy". In 1969 the government set up a full Judicial Tribunal to investigate an RTE programme on the problem of extensive illegal moneylending - not to investigate the problem but to investigate the programme.

7 In fact the real figure is probably lower. Un-noted distortions in aggregate economic data due to the profit laundering activities of multinationals wrongly attributed to Ireland exaggerated levels of GNP growth in the 1970's and early 1980's. (see Meehan 1985; also O'Leary 1984)

8 The publicity shy Stafford was described by the then business editor of the Sunday Tribune as a "property developer and oil shares speculator". (Sunday Tribune, March 18, 1984) His main interests today are in bulk shipping bought during the recent world shipping slump. The other original Atlantic directors, Donal Flynn, a financial consultant in the computer area, and

Frank Devitt, involved in television rental and the relaying of off-air British channels through cable systems in Dublin, could not be described as having much experience of broadcasting either.

9 Hughes communications have begun Construction of the launch and stand-by satellites and have scheduled operation in orbit by the end of 1988. Cost of satellite construction and launch are estimated at $60-70m and $40m respectively while total commercial start-up costs are estimated at between $300 to $400m.

10 The way in which Irish companies may initially act as stalking horses for U.S. competition with European capital in the latter's market is likely in the future to come under closer scrutiny from the EEC and from other pan-European agencies. The head of the European Space Agency (ESA) has been in Dublin to meet with the Irish government and put the case for ESA's Arianne launcher. The EEC is trying to forge a pan-European co-ordination in advanced technology, an area of intense competition wit the U.S. and Japan. The industrial policy of the IDA in relation to U.S. electronics assemply firms and the decision with regard to the Satellite franchise are likely to make few friends in the EEC.

11 Tansey, The great 'phone raid, Sunday Tribune, Octber 14, 1984. The first head of Bord Telecom resigned after a year in office as a result of this action.

12 There is evidence for just such a 'softening-up' process. In recent disputes management has been accused of dispensing with written agreements and attempting to penalise individual workers by reducing them to the first stage on the salary increment scale. These moves have been blunted initially through the threat of total disruption (Irish Times, March 8, 1986). However, they must be analised as initial skirmishes in what promises to be a long and complicated campaign of attrition. In one of the recent disputes the staff concerned were of the opinion that the management action was a provocation where the period of strike action would be used to begin implementing new work practices.

13 "The Channel Controller would develop the proposed schedule and programme mix and identify outline requirements of the programmes..... The Channel Controller would have the option of rejecting a proposal (from the programme department) if he could show that more economical alternatives were available." (SKC:36)

14 Emerging film production companies are versed in the intricacies of the Enterprise allowance scheme, allowing potential investers to offset their investment against taxation. RTE itself has provided the basis for the setting up of 'free-lance' production facilities in the past. This is likely to to be increasingly the case in future. For example Anner Communications started out as a small film company making documentaries for RTE and providing facilites for RTE current affairs from the late 1960's. It now produces the

weekly 'Irish Angle' for Channel 4 and has recently invested £2m, grant aided by the IDA, in a new high-tech video facility. The main emphasis is on the business video market. It is hoped to catch a sizable chunk of the hitherto underdeveloped Irish market which is seen as "dormant and ready for cultivation" (The exceptional growth of video making, Irish Times, September 13, 1985).

15 "Since the SKC report was published RTE has been offering inducements to staff to leave or to enter into independent production arrangements... (RTE) has agreed to co-produce documentary and features programmes with (Muiris) MacChonghail until 1990." (Broadcast, Feb 21, 1986.) MacConghail has left RTE to set up an independent production and communications company. He is the former controller of RTE 1 and one time head of the Government Information Service. He is of the opinion that "creativity can best flourish outside the walls of a broadcasting organisation" (Harris, MacConghail speak out, Access, Sept. 27, 1984).

16 The economies of the market place are leading to massive trading losses for one of the flagships of the independent sector, Limehouse productions, formerly the disenfranchised Southern Television. The uncertainty surrounding ongoing commissions has lead other independents to wonder about their survival. Channel 4 has been commissioning "more programmes from the ITV companies and less from the independent sector... (with the result) that the average cost of the independent's material has increased, while ITV's dropped.... The ITV companies, who have gradually been exercising greater influence over the channel's programme policies, can make commissioning editors' budgets stretch further by producing studio based series with the price advantage of the built in economies of scale of their production operations." (Independent Deterrrent by David Housham, the Listener, February 20, 1986)

17 The orders are now renewed annually, after Conor Cruise O'Brien's ammendment as Minister in 1976. The ammendment stated that the Minister could prohibit anything "likely to promote, or incite to crime, or would tend to undermine the authority of the state". O'Brien's Order named the IRA, Sinn Fein, some Loyalist groups and "any organization... proscribed... (by) the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions Act 1978)". This latter is a piece of <u>British</u> legislation. Presumably O'Brien did not think its inclusion undermined the 'authority' of the <u>Irish</u> state. (see Meehan, 1986; Repeal Section 31 Committee.)

18 The general manager of Radio Nova, the largest of the pirates, recently reported an expected yearly turnover of £1 million.

19 There are barriers to the enactment of the Local Radio Bill. The junior government coalition partner, the Labour Party, will not support the extent of privatisation envisaged in it. Unregulated and illegal broadcasting continues in the meantime.

20 The same general manager of Nova illustrated that the 'pirates' want commercial deregulation while welcoming political regulation: "He believes that radio is much the same as any other sort of business and should exist independently of government, be self-financing and 'clutter-free' of onerous regulations - though he does believe in caution and responsibility in political matters." (Irish Press, 11 April 1983.)

21 It must be stated, however, that the NUJ did not support 'disruptuptive' industrial action affecting news and current affairs programming. This course of action was successfully pushed by the producers and office staff union, the Federated Workers Union of Ireland. Sadly, recent statements by RTE NUJ spokespersons indicates a 'drift' back to the pre-Real Lives approach, universally regarded having been utterly ineffectual.

APPENDICES

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APPENDIX 1

TV Programmes Output Statistics
Home Produced Programmes
(Excludes transmission costs)

Department	Output Hours	Hours per producer	Total cost per hour (IR£000)
Directorate/ Controllerate	86	-	39
Presentation	51	26	22
Education	4	-	88 (incl. Radio Costs)
Agriculture	33	11	31
Religion	79	26	10
Sport	584	117	7
Entertainment	198	28	31
Young People	167	19	13
Features	196	9	22
Drama	21	2	181
Current Affairs	138	17	34
CoProductions	3	-	157
Total	1,560	21	21

Source: SKC

APPENDIX 2==========

RTE income and expenditure accounts - 1980 to 1984
Year ended 30 September

IR£000's

	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
Income					
- Fees	17,457	20,573	22,968	26,017	29,468
- Advertising	19,401	23,110	27,607	28,885	33,191
- Other broadcasting	1,884	1,765	1,815	2,114	4,826
Amortization of grants	68	68	68	68	69
Broadcasting Income	38,882	45,516	52,457	57,084	67,554
Broadcasting Expenditure	35,242	42,584	48,218	52,654	63,708
NET BROADCASTING INCOME	3,580	2,932	4,239	4,430	3,846
Income from					
RTE Guide	(72)	49	224	497	415
RTE Relays	525	336	386	513	717
Surplus before interest /depreciation	4,021	3,317	4,849	5,440	4,979
Depreciation	2,042	2,361	2,610	2,711	2,847
Interest	1,927	2,443	2,843	2,659	2,583
Extraordinary items	-	(752)	-	-	-
SURPLUS (DEFICIT)	52	(2,240)	(604)	90	(451)

Source: SKC

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APPENDIX 3==========

Summary of RTE cash flow for five years ended
30 September 1984
IR£000's

INFLOW	
Surplus/deficit on I & E A/C	(3,153)
Depreciation	14,280
Other Movements	399
	11,526
Net Increase in Working Capital	(793)
OPERATIONAL CASH FLOW	10,733
Fixed Asset Disposals	536
TOTAL INTERNAL CASH FLOW	11,269
OUTFLOWS	
Fixed Asset Expenditure	27,724
RTE Relays/Dublin Cable Systems	1,739
SHORTFALL	(14,194)
FINANCED BY:	
Net movements in loan & bank balances	
- Repayable Exchequer Advances	(5,311)
- Bank Loans	(3,927)
- Bank Overdrafts	(5,504)
- Loans from Pension Fund	150
- Cash	3,190
- Deferred Liabilities	2,792
TOTAL	(14,194)

Source: SKC

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